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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran UN Reform  
PARIS - Wednesday, March 08, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran  
UN Reform

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Domestic social political issues dominate today's front-page headlines and editorials. Yesterday's strikes and the mounting dissatisfaction with PM Villepin's employment plan are extensively analyzed. Commentators note Villepin's loss of popular support in the ratings but report that "he is standing firm." The Socialist Party's criticism of the government's employment policy is widely reported.

Women's Day is today's second lead story, with wide coverage of employment equality or the lack thereof in France and elsewhere in Europe, especially at the political level. This morning France 2 TV reported that France's women are poorly represented at the National Assembly: France is next to last in the list, just before Hungary. Scandinavian countries top the list.

Le Monde devotes its editorial to Iran in an analysis which concludes that the U.S. "wants to topple the Iranian regime," more than contain its nuclear ambitions. (See Part C) Le Monde also carries an analysis of UN reform penned by Daniel Vernet. (See Part C)

Catholic La Croix devotes a one page report to the British film, "The Road to Guantanamo" which tells the story of three Muslim youth from Great Britain who travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan before ending up in Guantanamo. The story is entitled "Opposition to Guantanamo Grows in the UK." Eric Albert concludes: "The many calls from within the British Cabinet to close Guantanamo are a growing embarrassment to Downing Street." The film won last week the Berlin Film Festival's Silver Bear Award. According to the article, "the scenes depicting the detainees are particularly harsh."

Liberation devotes a report to Turkey's handling of the Muhammad caricatures, and points out that "although the tempest is over, it will leave its mark, especially in Turkey's relations with the EU-25." Liberation quotes a Turkish professor of EU issues: "The image of Turkey has seriously suffered in Brussels because the Erdogan government reacted first as a Muslim nation. Even if it spoke in the name of moderate Islam, it did not understand that what was at stake was freedom of the press and the right of law, not dialogue between civilizations."

Economic Les Echos devotes a full page to France's snafu with biometric passports in a report entitled: "A Bug, French Style." The Counsel of State's decision to grant the Imprimerie Nationale the monopoly on printing biometric passports "will cost the state dearly." A separate report details the costly obstacle course for U.S. visa candidates who do not have the appropriate passport to travel to the U.S. visa-free. The main story concludes: "Even if biometric passports will begin to be issued next month, it will take time before the Imprimerie Nationale can catch up. But beyond the issue of U.S. visas, the EU has asked its members to establish biometric passports by August 28. France cannot afford to miss the new deadline." A separate story in the satirical weekly Le Canard Enchaîné points to Interior Minister Sarkozy as being responsible, "and all for what? Millions of euros lost in travel revenues, planetary humiliation for France and we are back where we started from."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

"Bush and Iran"

The unsigned Le Monde editorial (03/08) comments on the "front-stage play whose theme is the transfer of the Iran nuclear crisis to the UNSC with the players apparently united. But this may simply be a smokescreen hiding a different battle. When John Bolton says that Iran is a 'global threat,' he is in

fact revealing President Bush's true concerns. He is not just alluding to Iran's nuclear ambitions, which are just making things worse. He is pointing at Ahmadinejad's statements against Israel, his support of terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and Iran's ambivalent role in the incidents which are tearing Iraq apart. In short he is simply putting in question Iran's regime, in which he sees the source of all evil. In this light, the solution does not lie with the nuclear crisis and the UNSC. It is no coincidence if the U.S. has never directly taken part in the negotiations with Iran, leaving Europe to deal with them. If they had succeeded, everyone would have benefited. But mainly, Washington never really believed they would be successful, and mostly it had other priorities. President Bush and his friends have one goal in Iran: to change the regime. To reach that goal they will use every means possible. The sanctions they are seeking against Iran are not aimed at stopping Iran from pursuing its nuclear program. Their aim is to undermine the regime. The talk of possible military strikes on Iranian nuclear installations has to be analyzed within this context. It is easier to talk about a regime change than to implement it, especially in view of the Iraqi fiasco. But the fact remains that the Americans are slowly revealing their true intentions. Beyond the seriousness of the Iran nuclear issue, the Europeans would do well to keep in mind this other stakes in the Iranian tug of war, or they will find themselves caught in the middle."

#### UN Reform

"The UN and Human Rights"

Daniel Vernet in left-of-center Le Monde (03/08): "The international community as a whole agrees that the UN Human Rights Commission needs to be reformed especially in light of discredit it has faced over the last few years. Is reform of the Human Rights Commission destined to failure? This is what the Americans fear. The reform proposed by General Assembly President Jan Eliasson has been called 'shameful' by the New York Times, which for once is on the same side as President Bush and UN Ambassador John Bolton. Two philosophies are at loggerheads within the UN: on the one hand the realism of the majority which is happy with the progress made despite the difficult conditions, and on the other the intransigence of the Americans, who mistrust an international organization where they and other western democracies can be outnumbered by nations which everyday violate human rights and civil liberties. The U.S. is concerned that half measures will hinder real reform. This semi reform of the UN which is underway reflects the ambivalence of this organization."

STAPLETON